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VETERAN TOM

AND

THE SURGEON.

BY

MARY L. DEMAREST.

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VETERAN TOM AND THE SURGEON.

A FIRST-RATE surgeon, sir, you are,
To bathe and set and bind
Our broken bones, but you can't set
At rest a troubled mind.
I've heard you talk, sir, many a time;
You are so young and free
You'll not be vexed, sir, with the words
Of an old man like me?
Now, what's the use of blaming God,
And pulling things apart?
Does all this fretting save from sin
Or heal a broken heart?
Men can't find out by guessing, sir,
Just how they got their breath,
Nor where the atom came from first,
Nor what comes after death.
And when some dreadful grief and loss
Comes marching on with doubt,

They find from everything in life
The bottom drops right out.
I've heard how one—a great man, sir,
In England—who denied
The God that made him, broke his heart
When his own idol died.
I was so sorry for that man!
If he had only known
God loves us far too well to give
Our hungry hearts a stone!
A pity 'tis, sir, as you say,
Some folks that God has fed
Don't seem to know the difference
Between a stone and bread.
You see, we are so obstinate,
So foolish, sir, and blind,
Outside our prison-doors we say,
"The cell's more to our mind."
And many a time we grow so proud
That we are sure to fall;
But mind you, sir, the fault is ours,
And not the Lord's at all.
And as for doubts and questionings
That vex so many still,

He says his doctrine shall be known
To them that do his will.

You want to hear my story, sir?
It's kind of you, I'm sure;
I'm only Tom the veteran,
A cripple, old and poor.
I went into the army, sir,
When I was but a lad;
For nigh on thirty years it was
The only home I had.
And then I quit, sir, for a while.
What made me change my life?
Why, we had laid some money up,
Myself, sir, and my wife
(She didn't like the service much,
She thought it made me wild);
And so we bought a little home
For us and for the child.
But soon our boy fell sick and died;
It was a fearful blow.
My wife had all the courage then;
I got so awful low,

And fretted so against the Lord,
  She said to me one day,
"Tom, don't you think it's time that you
  Should give the Lord his way?
He'll do his will, you may be sure,
  No matter how we fight;
And though my arms are empty, Tom,
  I know his ways are right."

I quit my grumbling, then and there.
  We had a blessed life
Together for one twelvemonth; then
  He took away my wife.
Oh, sir, I did not fight him then;
  It seemed to me her prayer,
Her dying prayer to God, it was
  That kept me from despair;
For just when all the world grew dark
  The Lord became my light;
I reached my empty arms to him—
  I knew his ways were right.

Then other troubles came through men—
  They swore I was a thief,

They stole my good name from me, sir,
And gave me years of grief.
They called me canting hypocrite,
Mocked at my God and jeered,
Until one day the thief confessed,
And my good name was cleared.

But oh, in every trouble, sir,
And in my sore disgrace,
I never yet did find the Lord
Had turned away his face.

Not for my goodness—no, sir, no!
But for his faithfulness;
The Lord's a friend that always sticks
The closer in distress.

Oh, that was years and years ago,
And now I'm old and lame;
They sent me to this hospital
The year before you came.

I'd rather not be pensioned off,
Though I am only fit
To help the sicker fellows, sir,
And cheer them up a bit.

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I'm like that old cup on the shelf,
That's only good to hold
Fresh water for some thirsty chap
(It's clean, sir, though it's old).
The devil used to whisper, sir,
"It was a trifle hard
That when a fellow wants to march,
He's ordered to stand guard."
But now I wait my Captain's word;
'Twill sound through all the host;
I want him, when he comes, to find
Me faithful at my post.

You ask me, Does his service pay?
Ah, sir, *indeed it do;*
He died for me, he saved my soul—
He'll do the same for you.
With all your learning and your strength,
Your free and hearty ways,
Oh 'list for Jesus! then you'll find
How well his service pays!

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